DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 265 EC 200 573

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TITLE The Strategies and Goals of Learning Disabled Children in Social Situations.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Baltimore, MD, April 23-26, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Age Differences; Cognitive Development; Elementary Education; *Interpersonal Competence; *Learning Disabilities; Males; Peer Relationship; Role Perception; *Social Cognition; Social Development

ABSTRACT

The goals and strategies formulated by 30 learning disabled (LD) and 30 non-learning disabled (NLD) males at two age levels (8 to 9 and 11 to 12 years) were analyzed. Subjects were interviewed regarding their strategies and goals in four situations involving peer interactions. They were also videotaped during a role play assessment of social skills. Findings revealed that LD subjects produced goals significantly less sophisticated than their NLD peers. Younger boys came up with less friendly strategies and less sophisticated goals than the older ones. Children's goals were strongly correlated with social skillfulness. Overall, the social goals spontaneously developed by LD males appeared to be similar to those of younger children, suggesting a possible deficiency in the cognitive skills necessary to formulate general social rules which would affect their interpersonal functioning. Results highlight the potential role of social goals in the development of problematic peer status in LD children. (Author/CL)

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THE STRATEGIES AND GOALS OF LEARNING DISABLED CHILDREN IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS

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EC 200573

ABSTRACT

Learning disabled (LD) children encounter greater peer difficulties than nondisabled (NLD) children. However, the contributions of social-cognitive factors to their lower peer status have received very limited attention. The present study examined differences between LD and NLD children with respect to the goals and strategies they formulate in peer situations. Also, children's goals and strategies were related to independent assessments of their social functioning.

30 LD and 30 NLD males at two age levels (8-9; 11-12 years), were interviewed regarding their strategies and goals in four situations involving peer interactions. The boys were also videotaped during a roleplay assessment of social skills.

Analyses revealed that LD males generated significantly less sophisticated goals than NLD males. Also, younger boys generated less friendly strategies and less sophisticated goals than older boys. Children's goals were strongly correlated with social "skillfulness."

Overall, the social goals spontaneously generated by LD males appeared to be similar to those of younger children. This suggests that LD males may be deficient in the cognitive skills necessary to formulate general social rules; this in turn may affect their interpersonal functioning. Results highlight the potential role of social goals in the development of problematic peer status in LD children.

RATIONALE

Research has found that learning disabled (LD) children are less accepted and more actively rejected by peers than nondisabled (NLD) children (see La Greca, 1981). However, the contributions of social-cognitive factors to the lower peer status of LD children have received very limited attention. LD children do not use organized, goal-directed strategies when performing academic tasks; it is possible that problems with developing appropriate goals and strategies for peer interactions also interfere with LD children's peer functioning. The present study tested the hypothesis that LD children would differ from NLD children with respect to the goals and strategies they independently formulate in interpersonal situations. Based on previous work with popular and unpopular children, it was hypothesized that LD children would formulate less friendly strategies and less sophisticated goals than NLD children; however, LD children were not expected to differ from NLD children when selecting appropriate social goals and strategies presented in a multiple choice format. Moreover, children's goals and strategies were expected to relate to an independent assessment of their social functioning.

AIMS

1. To examine the strategies and goals that LD children construct for various social situations and compare them to the responses of their nondisabled peers.

2. To replicate previous findings of developmental differences in children's goals and strategies.

METHOD

Subjects

30 LD males, 30 NLD males
Ages 8-9 years, 11-13 years.
Assigned to four groups (15 Ss each):
- Younger LD
- Younger NLD
- Older LD
- Older NLD

See Table 1 for subject characteristics.

Procedure

Interviews on strategies and goals in four hypothetical situations involving the initiation and maintenance of peer interactions. Situations were presented in an open-ended response format, and then in a multiple-choice format. (See Table 2.)

Responses were scored for open-ended goals, open-ended strategies, multiple-choice goals, multiple-choice strategies. Strategies were rated on their degree of friendliness; goals on their degree of specificity or sophistication. Scores ranged from 4-16.

Individually administered Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R), as a check on general intellectual functioning.

Children were videotaped in a roleplay situation involving the initiation and maintenance of peer contacts, and were rated for overall "skillfulness" on a 7-point Likert scale. Interrater reliabilities for all measures were found to be very acceptable (.89 or higher).

RESULTS

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Group (LD, NLD) by Age (8-9, 11-12) ANOVAs for the open-ended responses revealed that LD children generated significantly less sophisticated goals than NLD children ($p < .05$). (See Table 3.)

No differences between the types of strategies formulated by LD and NLD children were observed.

Age differences were obtained; younger children generated less friendly strategies ($p < .01$) and less sophisticated goals ($p < .05$).

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

LD and NLD boys did not differ in the friendliness and sophistication of their social strategies and goals when using the multiple-choice format. (See Table 4.)

Older children were found to choose friendlier strategies than younger children ($p < .01$). No differences were obtained for the measure of multiple-choice goals.

All subjects' open-ended responses were compared to their multiple-choice responses using repeated measures analyses. The multiple-choice strategies of all subjects were found to be more friendly than their open-ended strategies ($p < .01$) and the multiple-choice goals of all subjects were found to be more sophisticated than their open-ended goals ($p < .01$).

CORRELATIONS

Children's open-ended strategies ($r=.22$, $p < .05$) and open-ended goals ($r=.44$, $p < .001$) were significantly related to an independent assessment of social skillfulness.

Multiple choice strategies ($r=.11$) and multiple choice goals ($r=.01$) were unrelated to social skillfulnes.

PPVT-R

No measures were significantly related to scores on PPVT-R.

TABLE 1

Mean Age and IQ for Subject Sample

	LD		Non-LD	
	Younger (n=15)	Older (n=15)	Younger (n=15)	Older (n=15)
Age (Yrs)	8.53 (.74)	11.60 (.63)	8.13 (.35)	11.20 (.41)
PPVT-R	107.27 (15.60)	97.87 (9.02)	105.67 (14.04)	106.53(15.32)
IQ	102.2	113.1	NA	NA

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses; PPVT-R = Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised; IQ = WISC-R Full Scale; NA = Not available.

TABLE 2

Social Skills Interview

The social skills interview consisted of the four following hypothetical social situations (Asher & Renshaw):

1. Your parents have moved to a new town. This is your first day of school. At recess the children go out to play.
2. One free period you have nothing to do. Then you see two children getting out a game of Monopoly. You go over to them and they say, "Hey, we didn't ask you."
3. You play with your friend at recess most of the time. One day you see your friend playing with a child you dislike.
4. You ask a child who is new in the neighborhood to watch cartoons one Saturday morning. After about ten minutes the child changes the channel without asking.

In the open-ended interview each situation was followed by two questions: (1) What would you do? and (2) Why would you do that? In the multiple-choice interview, each situation was followed by these same questions, however, each question had four possible answers for the subject to choose from.

TABLE 3

Mean Open-Ended Responses for Subject Sample

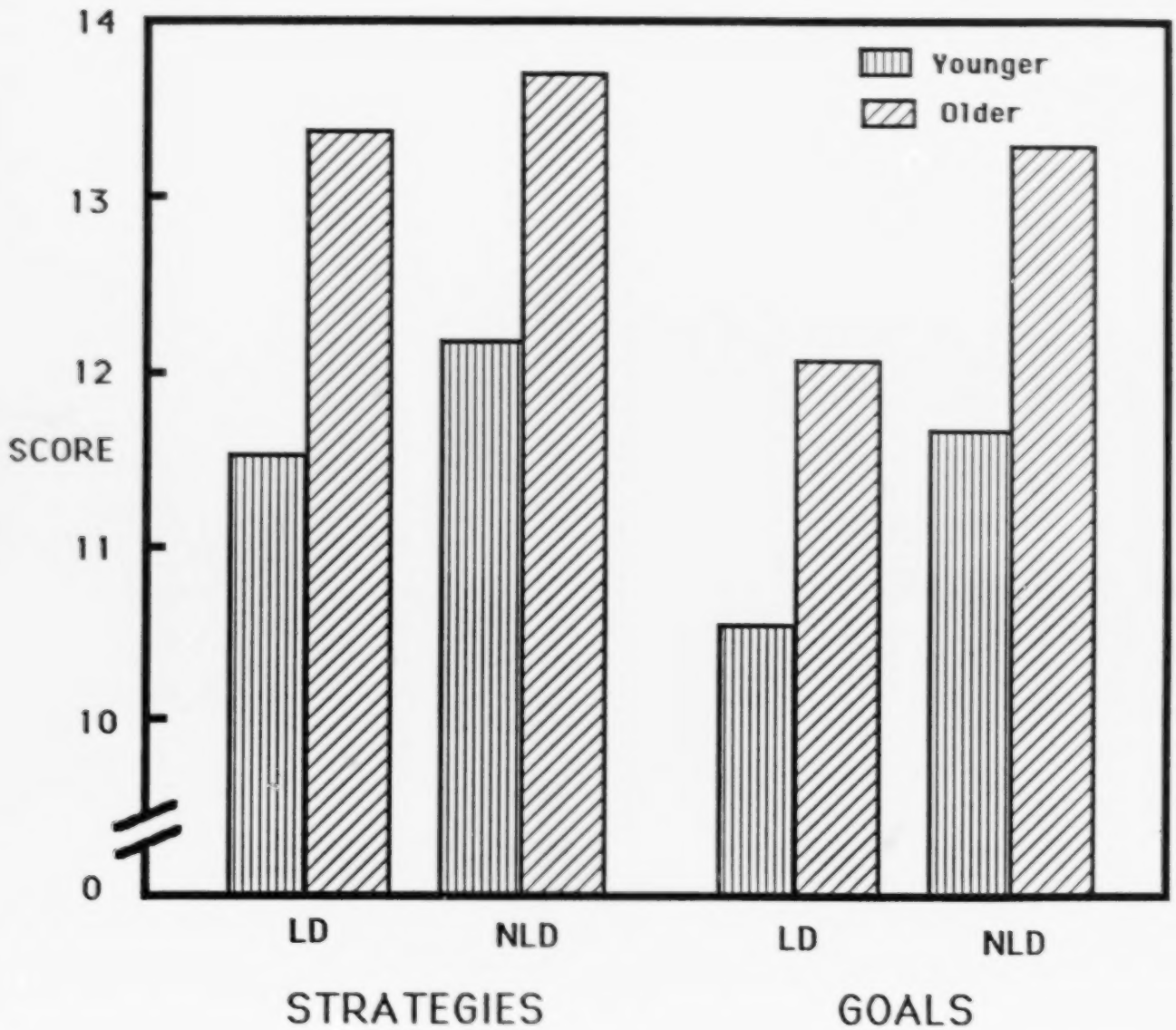
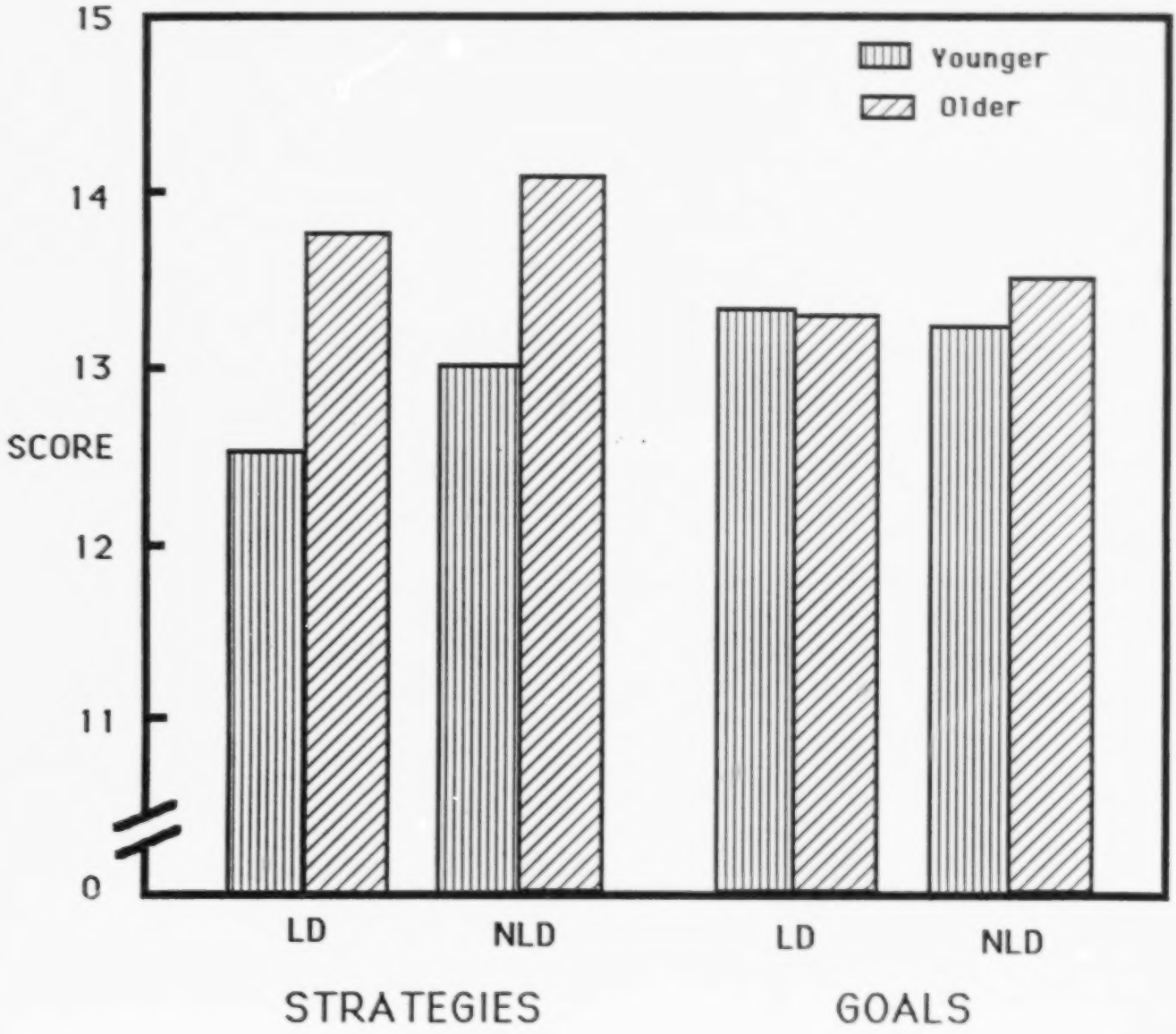


TABLE 4

Mean Multiple-Choice Responses for Subject Sample



CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the results suggest that LD children may be deficient in the cognitive skills necessary to formulate general social rules (ie., social goals); this in turn may be related to their social functioning with peers. The goals which LD children spontaneously generate in social situations appear to be similar to those of younger nondisabled children. These findings parallel research with unpopular children, whose ideas about social situations have been characterized as less prosocial, less normative, less sophisticated, and less resourceful than those of their more popular classmates. The results highlight the potential role of social goals in the development of problematic peer status in LD children.

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Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting

of the

Society for Research in Child Development

Balitmore, MD, April 23-26, 1987